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# NEWSLETTER *of the* HABITAT COUNCIL

## HABITAT COUNCIL TIDINGS A MESSAGE FROM YOUR CO-CHAIRS

### 2023 & 2024 NATIONAL EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

**RMEF Hunter & Outdoor Christmas Expo**  
December 7-16, 2023  
Las Vegas, Nevada

**NFR**  
December 7-16, 2023  
Las Vegas, Nevada

**RMEF 40th Celebration**  
May 3-4, 2024

**HC Event**  
May 2-4, 2024 (tentative)  
Missoula, Montana

Next spring, RMEF celebrates 40 years of conservation, and the Habitat Council will gather in the state where it all began. Please join as a member of RMEF's most dedicated supporters, engaging with leadership, viewing work you support, and spending time with like-minded conservationists. The HC event will coincide with RMEF's 40th celebration event, where HC members will be able to enjoy exclusive dinners and activities, while also participating in the general festivities.

Please save the dates, and stay tuned for more information to follow.



Tom and Sue Meehl  
RMEF Habitat Council Co-chairs

Autumn has arrived, and for some, the changing season sparks renewed hopes of filling the coveted tag they were fortunate enough to draw. Many dream of leisurely hiking through the woods bursting with color while expectantly watching for any critters that may be scurrying about. Yet, while fall is a great time to enjoy that cup of hot spiced cider or a pumpkin spice latte, now is also the perfect time to consider giving your continued financial support to RMEF.

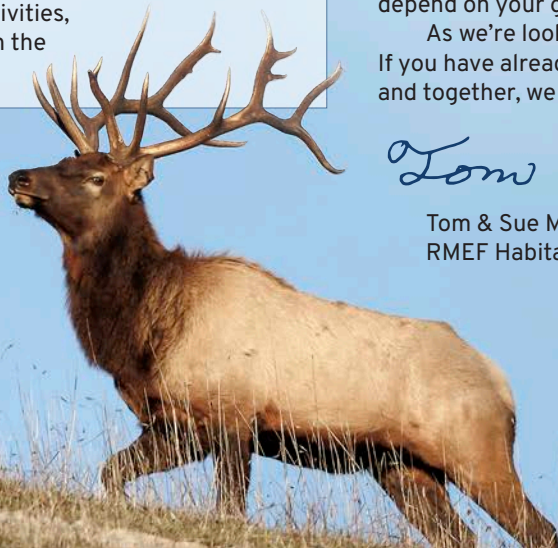
Here on the farm, we are gearing up for our annual grape harvest that will be happening over the next six weeks or so. The grape clusters are beginning to wear the beautiful purple hue we've been waiting for, and our vineyards show promise of yielding an excellent crop. Still, that only happens after months of intensive preparation with substantial investment beforehand. In the same way, our giving from the heart today ensures RMEF has the needed revenue to plan for furthering our mission in the future.

The spirit and support of the Habitat Council is "on-the-ground," alive and well, and working today. This fall and into the winter, RMEF is aiming to close the second phase, 10,963-acre Minam Acquisition, a 55,000-acre easement in Kentucky, funding critical research on CWD, and more. This work was seeded from past contributions, just as 2024 and beyond will depend on your giving at the end of this year.

As we're looking forward, please join us by donating to RMEF this fall. If you have already given in 2023, we thank you! We can make a difference, and together, we will celebrate the fantastic success that will follow.

*Tom Meehl Sue Meehl*

Tom & Sue Meehl  
RMEF Habitat Council Co-Chairs



## Conserving and Growing Access Within Pennsylvania Elk Country

There is nowhere east of the Mississippi where the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation has done more concentrated land conservation and habitat stewardship work than northcentral Pennsylvania. Dating back to 1991, RMEF and its partners completed nearly 70 projects in the heart of the state's elk range. And that number will only grow later in 2023 and beyond.

The two-phase Goetz Summit Acquisition aims to expand State Game Lands 14 by 2,386 acres – 639 acres in phase I (fall 2023) and 1,747 acres in phase II following in late 2024. Appropriately enough, the acreage is in Elk County, approximately five miles east of St. Marys, located within 20 miles of more than 30 previous RMEF land conservation and habitat projects. It will be managed by the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC).

The project's wildlife connectivity benefits are many. It will permanently link habitat for elk, deer, black bears, ruffed grouse, turkey and other wildlife from State Game Lands 14

north to a 712-acre parcel enrolled in a public access program as PGC Forest Game Lands, which then connects to State Game Lands 293. The conservation impact of this acquisition is amplified by a 1,533-acre conservation easement held by The Nature Conservancy along the southern boundary of the Goetz Summit property. It will also conserve nearly two miles of Big Run, a designated Class-A trout stream.

And then there is a big public access upside. Upon closing of phase II, this project will create a contiguous link of approximately 21,503 PGC-managed public access acres previously separated by the Goetz Summit property.

Pennsylvania is home to more than 14,000 RMEF members and 30 chapters that strongly support RMEF's work in the Keystone State. Since 1991, RMEF and its partners completed 564 conservation and hunting heritage outreach projects in Pennsylvania with a combined value of more than \$27.9 million. These projects conserved or enhanced 28,605 acres of habitat and opened or improved public access to 10,189 acres.

## Supporting the Fight Against CWD

In this day and age of advanced scientific findings, chronic wasting disease continues to be a bit of a head-scratcher. According to the Chronic Wasting Disease Alliance, CWD is an always-fatal nervous system disease found in deer, elk and moose that can be transmitted through direct animal contact, contact with saliva, feces, carcass parts of an infected animal, or through soil contaminated with any of the above tissues or fluids.



More scientific knowledge is needed so scientists, biologists and game managers can get a better handle on the disease, how to better detect it and how to manage its spread and impact. RMEF has been and continues to be a front-line player in the quest to advance CWD knowledge.

Since 1995, RMEF, a founding member and sponsor of the CWD Alliance, supplied more than \$800,000 to state agencies and other partners for CWD surveillance, management, research and outreach. More recently, RMEF committed \$200,000 in 2022-23 for these CWD studies:

### DEVELOPMENT OF A LIVE CWD TEST (University of Tennessee)

Development of a rapid and sensitive platform for detection of CWD prions in live animal samples

### CWD PREVALENCE IN THE BLACK HILLS (South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks)

Assessing the environmental prevalence of CWD among elk in high-use areas in the Black Hills and its possible impact on reproduction, survival and population growth

### CWD PRIONS & MARKERS OF DISEASE RISK IN FECAL SAMPLES (Cornell University)

Intersectional study to advance early detection methods for CWD and host factors of high CWD risk using non-invasive samples

### MITIGATING CWD PREVALENCE IN WIND RIVER MULE DEER POPULATION (Wyoming Game & Fish Department, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service & U.S. Geological Survey)

Integrate data on CWD prevalence, habitat and deer density to identify hotspots to help develop effective management strategies

### POPULATION LEVEL IMPACTS OF CWD ON ARKANSAS WHITE-TAILED DEER (Arkansas Game and Fish Commission & University of Georgia)

Estimate deer abundance, evaluate influences of CWD on demographic and behavior, determine infection rates and develop a model to forecast the effects of management action on future CWD spread

# Conservation in the Old Dominion



Virginia is known for many things including site of the first permanent English settlement, the birthplace of eight different U.S. presidents and home to the Arlington National Cemetery. It is also home to wild, free-ranging elk. And because of that, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation has played and continues to play a key role.

Today, more than 4,400 RMEF members and six chapters are in Virginia. Dating back to 1993, RMEF and its partners completed 83 conservation and hunting heritage outreach projects there with a combined value of more than \$2.2 million. Along the way, RMEF supplied critical funding and volunteer support to help restore elk to their historic Virginia range in 2012.



With elk on the ground, RMEF since provided funding to enhance habitat not only for elk but also for deer, turkey and a wide array of wildlife. In 2022, RMEF collaborated with partners to allocate \$1.45 million over two years for habitat work in Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, West Virginia and six projects in Virginia:

- Create eight wildlife water developments and apply seeding on two separate private land parcels in Buchanan County to improve elk habitat.
- Use thermal imagery technology via drones to conduct an elk population survey in Wise County.
- Burn 5,033 acres in the George Washington & Jefferson National Forests to improve wildlife habitat in proximity to the core area for the Wise County elk herd.
- Conserve 175 acres in Virginia's elk zone in an area where an access agreement allows public elk hunting.
- Treat 25 acres of invasive vegetation on reclaimed mine land in Wise County to establish native warm season grasses and forbs.
- Conserve 790 acres within Virginia's elk zone in Appalachia's Cumberland Forest and expand public access through an access agreement.

Also in 2022, Virginia announced its first-ever managed elk hunt. The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources awarded RMEF with its first elk conservation tag. RMEF hosted a raffle that generated more than \$93,000 to put back on the ground to benefit Virginia's elk. Thanks to that first hunt, hunters generated more than \$606,000 to bolster wildlife projects within the state's elk management elk zone. In 2023, RMEF received the opportunity to raffle off the state's second elk conservation tag and generated an additional \$60,000 for conservation.



Prescribed burn - Wise County, Virginia



**RMEF**  
5705 Grant Creek Road  
Missoula, MT 59808

First Class Mail  
U.S. Postage Paid  
Missoula, MT  
Permit No. 536

The Exclusive Newsletter for RMEF Habitat Council Members

# NEWSLETTER *of the* HABITAT COUNCIL



HUNTING  
IS  
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**RMEF.ORG**

## MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT



### **MORE OF THE SAME**

Just recently, over an afternoon coffee with an RMEF supporter, I heard one of the best and most optimistic comments made about our organization. To frame the quote, everything said prior to the statement was that of concern and uncertainty – uncertainty about the economy, concern for next generation, uncertainty over leadership, concern for the weather – it went on.

“Well Anderson, I’ll agree to make a gift again this year. At least I know what to expect from RMEF.”

It’s simple math, more of the same good work is great, right? It’s great for elk, it’s great for other wildlife, it’s great for hunters, it’s great for the economy and it’s great for the next generation.

Darn, you can even say that RMEF’s habitat stewardship work is great for the weather by making our landscapes more climate resilient.

Next year, the RMEF has plans to again, conserve more land, open more access, increase habitat work, put more funds into wildlife management research and support the next generation of hunter-conservationists.

At year-end 2023, please support RMEF by making a gift today; as always, you can expect the same good work.

Thank you, and happy hunting.

Anderson Smith  
RMEF Director of Development

